

# The George Report...by George

The Senate Report on "Functions and Responsibilities of Deans of Faculties and Chairmen of Departments", otherwise known as the George Report, has been labelled the most reactionary document to come out of the depths of this university's administration. Its critics claim its adoption will seriously hinder progress on this campus, that it reinforces the status quo to an alarming degree, and should be thrown out.

Its authors say that they were only asked to examine the structures as they now exist, not to make any judgments as to their value or justification, and that is what they did. Critics come back with the reply that the structures as they are laid down in the George Report will be adopted as the standard position of the administration and any attempts at reform will be made that much harder.

All kinds of opinions have been expressed with posters, meetings and articles written for the Gazette, but somehow the Senate members who drafted the report remained in the background. The following interview is an attempt to give Professor George a chance to speak for the committee. It has not been edited and appears verbatim from the interview tape.

GAZ. — When your committee prepared the George Report, did it conceive of the report in the way that its critics interpreted it on the campus? Or do you think that they misinterpreted it?

GEORGE — Well I think the basic difference between the way the report is conceived by the committee, and by some of the people, at least, who read it, is in the terms of reference.

The committee was not asked to comment on the form of organization at Dalhousie, the system of government. It was asked entirely to comment on, outline and describe the functions, and responsibilities of Deans of Faculties and Chairmen of Departments. We had no mandate — we were not asked to and therefore we didn't consider whether the form of government which now exists at Dalhousie, is the ideal one, or even a suitable one. This wasn't our job and therefore we didn't do it.

Had our terms of reference been to inquire into the form of government at Dalhousie, of course that would have been a different matter. But I think that some of the people who have read it have interpreted it as an examination of government at Dalhousie, and they have got the impression that we endorse the present system of government as being a right and proper one, which of course we didn't.

GAZ. — Would you?

GEORGE — Well, I think any organization is imperfect. Every organization is a sort of compromise. And I don't think any one would pretend that the present organization at Dalhousie, in any University, or in any organization is perfect. I think there are probably disadvantages in our present organization and advantages in it.

GAZ. — What particularly interested a lot of people was the paragraph which compared the traditional line organization at Dalhousie to the Roman Military system, and actually said that there was some question as to whether this system of power and authority, devised for use in ancient slave and feudal societies, was applicable to the modern university... Didn't you feel, when you were dealing with that paragraph, some sense of contradiction or even absurdity in your work?

GEORGE — Clearly, you know, the organization of the university could be changed. The only reference, of course as you know well, was a comment that this is a very old one — it goes back a long, long way. It's still the standard system of organization in Canada and almost in the world. This is the way things work now. That doesn't say it's right. Our only comment on this was that it was a very old system, and there are some students of management who have some doubt that it is the ideal system for our present conditions. This is the way organizations work. Now it may be right, it may be wrong. Our only comment was that it's old.

CAMERAMAN — (laughter.)

## What do you mean by Democracy?

GAZ. — Do you think that there is anything to be said for democracy at the university?

GEORGE — What do you mean by democracy?

GAZ. — Perhaps a university whose governing bodies were controlled by those whom they affected.

GEORGE — By governing bodies, you're thinking of the Board of Governors and the Senate, or something else are you?

GAZ. — Yes, that sums up all of the apparent possibilities.

GEORGE — You're asking whether I think they should be elected rather than appointed?

Oh yes, I think that any scheme which you might propose or I might propose has merits, and also demerits.

GAZ. — Could you refer more specifically to the merits and demerits of this particular scheme?

GEORGE — (pause) Well, at this stage of the game, I think that I don't want to close my mind to all the possibilities. I don't think that I know all the considerations.

I had in mind at this stage a committee or commission, or what ever it is called, that is about to be set up. The Senate at the last meeting approved such a committee, which would be representative of the various parts of the university and its job will be to inquire into the whole university structure.

Presumably, and I think ultimately, it will bring out all the arguments. And I think that until that time is reached and I've heard what they've got to say, I think I'd be a bit reluctant to come to any sort of firm conclusion on this.

GAZ. — Do you know what the terms of reference of that committee are, precisely?

GEORGE — No, the minutes are not out yet.

GAZ. — Our information, obtained from the Student Council President, is that that committee will be asked to study whether it will be desirable to form a committee to propose a new form of government for Dalhousie.

GEORGE — Yes, well the committee is initially, I think, is a fact — finding committee. It's got the job of describing, fully, the system of government at Dalhousie, collecting together all the documents which have been produced at Dalhousie at various times, to describe that system, and then, having gotten this, it's to be disseminated to all sectors of the university for comment. As a result of this comment, a decision will be taken as to where we go from there, whether certain aspects of the system need thorough examination.

GAZ. — One of the problems with this committee is that when it has concluded its study, it reports back to senate.

GEORGE — Well, officially, I suppose, it reports back to Senate, but I don't think that in practice this will make too much difference. I'm sure — I have no authority for saying this, because I'm not secretary of Senate — but my personal opinion is that I think this report will be generally available for all members of the university.

## The Report after the Report after the Report.

GAZ. — When the time comes for the second report — that is, the report after the report to decide whether one will have an implementable report, it is brought back particularly to the Senate for approval or disapproval. So the way that this committee must be set up, any change in what in our terms is an undemocratic structure, i.e. the Senate, must be approved by that same undemocratic structure. In political terms, we're trying to change a governing elite by convincing that elite that it must change itself.

GEORGE — Well, that's not quite true. It's not really an elite.

As a matter of fact, this report, which is now called, for some very old reason which I don't understand, the "George Report," is the sixth in a line of reports put out by the same people — the same committee — and about the second report recommended democratization of the Senate, or rather limited democratization, of the Senate.

As a result of this, instead of being a purely ex-officio body, that is the president and other full professors, there were elected members put on it, and there were three student representatives. Now, it's not quite as you described it.

GAZ. — How many are there on the senate?

GEORGE — After our report was written, there were twenty five elected professors, plus the three student representatives, which made an estimated total of about one hundred and twenty.

I gather that the size of the senate is about one hundred and seventy now, but as for what the make-up of that is, you would have to ask someone else.

## There were certain... uh... Problems.

GAZ. — What were the initial reasons for bringing about, initially, a study on the functions of deans and department heads?

GEORGE — Well, there were certain, uh, problems, last year which made it clear that in the past these had not been clearly defined. There was some confusion and misunderstanding, and that was the reason that we were asked to inquire into this.

GAZ. — What problems?

GEORGE — Well, again, this is not any special concern of mine, although there were problems, but the way the assignment was given to the committee was merely not to deal with those specific problems, but to concern itself with describing the relationships as they should be.

So we weren't asked to do an inquest on certain problems which had taken place, we were just asked to define a relationship.

GAZ. — But of course, the report had something to do with the sociology department, in as much as the report came out on June 16, which was just after the problem in Sociology.

GEORGE — Well, as for the reasons why the senate asked us to do this study: I have none, you know I'm not specially qualified to give an opinion. I didn't ask (laughing) for this job; the Senate asked that we should do it, and the motors behind Senate — you know, I've got some rough ideas, but I don't think that I'm anywhere near an authority on why the senate asked me to do it. A far more authoritative answer might come from the Secretary of Senate.

GAZ. — The reason that I ask is that last Year Dr. Hicks promised the Student Body, at the Sociology Strike Teach-In, that the whole problem of the relations between Department heads and departments was to be investigated by a special committee, and that upon the report of this committee, students would understand what their real relationship to the university was.

Now, at that time, he sent a letter to the Sociology students outlining a system of power and authority precise-

ly and probably not co-incidentally identical to the one which the George Report has talked about.

You will remember that at least part of the Sociology controversy centered on the change of the term Department Head to Departmental Chairman in the various Arts and Science departments. The argument was put that if the term had changed, the functions had also been changed, and if functions had not been changed, why change merely the names.

## Why change just the names?

GEORGE — You perhaps see something in these terms that I don't see, and again, I suppose you know that the first report of this committee was on the procedures for appointment of Chairmen or Heads of Departments, and it was also in that report that the name, at least in Arts and Science, because that report was only adopted in Arts and Science, the name of people who previously had been called Head of the Department was changed to Chairman of the Department. But it is made quite clear in the report that this was merely intended as a change in name, it wasn't intended as a change in function or responsibility. We suggested the name Chairman was more appropriate because we felt that it described, or connoted more accurately, the functions as they were actually being discharged. But we at that time were not recommending that the functions and relationships and responsibilities should be changed. It was really, as far as we were concerned, a change in name. Now I know other people interpreted this other ways, but certainly it wasn't intended that way by the committee when it brought out the report.

GAZ. — I find it hard to understand how you could relate the term "Chairman" to the person who through the centuries has been called "Department Head", and finds his age-old place in a military chain of authority.

Whether you are using the term in its parliamentary sense, or in its organizational sense, its applicability seems questionable.

GEORGE — I find it difficult to see how you could come to that conclusion.

GAZ. — Getting back to the arguments which you have made suggesting that the situations you describe are analysed without reference to whether they are right or wrong, is the question as neutral as that? What you are effectively doing is making the way "it is" more efficient. That is obviously why the report was commissioned. The Departmental situation could have been left, as you know, undefined: new structure could have arisen informally, in the same way that they have done in the past.

You effectively presented these informal changes to occur except through the most informal channels.

GEORGE — I think, you see, that what you've got in mind is that in some way our recommendation prevented the changes which I suspect you think ought to be made in a system of government.

GAZ. — I don't think it necessarily prevents them, but it formalizes the notion that people who aren't affected by



"I didn't ask for this job"

those changes have control over them, whereas people who are effected by them don't.

GEORGE — My real argument about this is that, of course, you are saying that Dalhousie consists of fifty independent organizations which have no relationship to one another. They do exactly what they think is appropriate. I would say that this atomization is highly undesirable.

## Elect the President ???!!!

GAZ. — The fact is that departments could elect chairmen, that faculties could elect deans, and that the whole university could elect the president. This would allow you to have a co-ordinating structure which in fact was responsible to the people who were effected by it. Are you saying that the only way in which a university can be co-ordinated and well-managed is by having an autocratic system of government where responsibility is to people at the top who are not necessarily responsible to those at the bottom?

GEORGE — Well if you believe that the Board of Governors and the Senate, and underneath them the faculties and under them the Departments, if, you believe that this is an autocratic system, then you have to remember that we took this as a "given".

We weren't asked to examine it. But one day, there will be wider inquiries than the one we were asked to do, as a matter of fact, the mechanisms for that procedure have, I should say, been set in motion.